

Tuesday, March 23, 2004

State Department of Health handles busy flu season

The combination of an earlier-than-normal onset, a potentially deadly strain, and a vaccine shortage made for a busy flu season at the Indiana State Department of Health.

By late November of 2003, the state's sentinel surveillance system, which is overseen by Shawn Richards in the Epidemiology Resource Center, was showing high rates of flu-like illness across the state.

Those numbers, combined with reports of flu-related deaths in some western states, prompted increased public awareness efforts at the State Department of Health to warn Hoosiers about the potentially severe flu season and encourage them

to get a flu shot if they haven't done so already.

Among other things, a news release was issued on December 2, and State Health Commissioner Greg Wilson, M.D. did several media interviews as part of the agency's efforts to get the word out.

Unfortunately, it was just a few days later that word of a national flu vaccine shortage began to surface. It appears that public health was a victim of its own success. So many people had heeded the advice to get a flu shot that the vaccine manufacturers were running out.

Steve Sellers, Immunization, led continuous efforts by Department of Health staff to find, purchase, and distribute as much additional vaccine as possible.

Meanwhile, in addition to explaining the vaccine situation and the continuing high rates of flu-like illness, the focus of the agency's public awareness efforts shifted to emphasize even more than before the importance of other prevention steps like practicing good hand washing techniques and staying home from



Still Still frames from video by Wade Kiffmeyer

State Health Commissioner Greg Wilson, M.D. discusses the flu season with WTHR-Channel 13.



Still frames from video by Wade Kiffmeyer

State Epidemiologist Bob Teclaw, D.V.M. is interviewed by WTHR-Channel 13 about Indiana's flu season.

work or school when feeling ill. The media attention continued through most of December and peaked on December 18, when the State Department of Health announced that a school-aged child was the state's first flu-related death of the season.

Thankfully, by the arrival of the new year the sentinel surveillance system was showing that the rate of flu-like illness in Indiana was beginning to drop.

That trend continued and by early February, the rate was back down to normal and even below-normal levels and has remained low since then.

See **THE STATS**– Page 3

Health officials plan for West Nile virus season

State health officials are already working on a strategic plan for monitoring and preventing West Nile virus during the 2004 mosquito season. Staff is currently revising the ISDH's West Nile Virus Action Plan from 2003, and will discuss the plan during a satellite uplink for local health departments on Friday, March 26.

The plan will include strategies for surveillance, control, and prevention as well as on communicating with the public. The Indiana State Department of Health will once again be asking local health departments to submit dead bluejays, crows, and raptors

for testing for the West Nile virus.

"Identifying the presence of the West Nile virus through the testing of dead birds is a good early warning sign of West Nile virus activity in an area," said James Howell, D.V.M., veterinary epidemiologist.

"The more information we can get earlier in the mosquito season, the more opportunity we have to try to lessen the risk of human exposure," Howell said.

Health officials report evidence of

See **WEST NILE**– Page 4

West Nile virus satellite uplink

Mark your calendars! On Friday, March 26 the Indiana State Department of Health will sponsor a satellite course on the 2004 West Nile Virus Action Plan. Participants can view the session from 1-3 p.m. EST. Check with the IHETS site near you.

Food protection officials attend seminar

From sanitation laws to salmonella to syrup, the food protection staff in Indiana must handle a variety of situations. Their ability to do that allows Hoosiers to sit down to worry-free meals everyday.

On March 9-11, the ISDH hosted the "Food Protection Symposium" at the Indiana Government Center. The symposium, which had some 220 people in attendance, brought state and local officials to discuss goals, difficulties, new regulations and new technologies.

Deputy State Health Commissioner Liz Carroll opened the symposium by saying that although Indiana has only 46 public health workers per 100,000 citizens, well beneath the national average, it is a dedicated workforce. She also reminded those in attendance that when things are going well, as with public health, the public pays no attention to the job well done. She asked that people in the field recognize each other for their good works.

Since the new Civil Penalty Rule Provisions had just been announced, Food Protection Manager Scott Gilliam opened the first day with an explanation of each provision. The provisions now state that the seriousness of a violation will be determined by four factors: the

potential for harm, the extent of deviation from the rule, the degree of willfulness, and how often the facility is in violation.

Ed Norris, Food Protection, then walked the group through the various exemptions. Norris guided his audience through examples, like ice cream in a milk shake is exempt, but not if on a cone. He also detailed another new rule that requires one



Photo by Dan Axler

Lee Bray, Food Protection, takes a break from the Food Protection Symposium presentations.

certified food handler must be employed by each establishment by January 5, 2005.

On the second day, those attending were introduced to F.I.R.M.S (Food Inspection Regulatory Management System). Both Joseph Shierling, ITS, and Margaret Voyles, Food Protection, took time to explain this new piece of software. The software program aims to make users' lives easier by tracking violations and compliance actions. The program also provides separate applications for



Photo by Dan Axler

Deputy State Health Commissioner Liz Carroll welcomes the symposium participants.

different types of facilities and counties. Useful search functions are also a highlight of F.I.R.M.S.

The crowd was enthusiastic about the program, as were the presenters, as Margaret Voyles stated in response to a question, "This is the coolest program since sliced bread! It's got a lot of potential."

HIPAA Corner

The Office of HIPAA Compliance (OHC) has successfully completed the agency-wide HIPAA Policies training.

The trainings were facilitated by the ISDH Privacy Officer, Patrick Hadley, who emphasized that these policies affect the entire agency, rather than just the programs directly covered by HIPAA.

ISDH workforce members who are temporarily assigned to work in covered programs governed by the HIPAA laws (Children's Special Health Care Services Program, Breast and Cervical Cancer Program, Medical Services Program and the Hemophilia Program), will be subject to and held accountable for complying with the same HIPAA policies and procedures applicable to full-time staff in that covered program.

The newly adopted agency-wide HIPAA policies are the HIPAA Privacy Policy, HIPAA Sanctions Policy, and the HIPAA Computer Transfer and Removal Policy.

All three are now available on the ISDH Intranet page. Click (1) ISDH Program Areas (2) State Health Commissioner (3) Human Resources (4) ISDH Personnel Policies.

If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact the Office of HIPAA Compliance.

— Contributed by Lisa Mani,
ISDH Privacy Coordinator



The Indiana State Department of Health Express is a biweekly publication for ISDH employees and stakeholders. Words in blue are links that you can access directly if you read the Express on-line. To submit news items, call (317) 234-2817 or send information to: ISDH Express, Office of Public Affairs, 2 N. Meridian St., Section 6G, Indianapolis, IN 46204-3003. Inquiries should be directed to:

Julie Fletcher, Editor
Telephone (317) 234-2817
Fax: (317) 233-7873

jfletche@isdh.state.in.us
<http://www.statehealth.IN.gov>

Margaret Joseph, Director of Public Affairs

Gregory A. Wilson, M.D.
State Health Commissioner

Liz Carroll, J.D.
Deputy State Health Commissioner

Indianapolis Asthma Alliance promotes youth poster contest

As part of its efforts to raise awareness about asthma, the Asthma Alliance of Indianapolis is encouraging children with asthma to participate in its World Asthma Day poster contest. The young participants are asked to create a poster that expresses their feelings about asthma.

"Whether it's depicting the constraints asthma can place on a person or how secondhand smoke can trigger an asthma attack, each of the entries represents real life situations that can inform, inspire, and touch your heart," said Robin Costley, asthma educator and program manager at the Marion County Health



Poster by Ben Rodimel

Asthma is a chronic lung disease that can be life threatening. The airways in the lungs get blocked, causing the lungs to get less air than normal.

Symptoms of an "asthma attack" can be difficulty with breathing, a tight feeling in the chest, coughing and wheezing.

"This contest can be a wonderful opportunity for the children to share how they are feeling and to communicate it in a way that can provide information to parents and other care providers," said Costley.

The World Asthma Day poster contest is open to children in grades K-8 and children ages 5 and 14. The deadline for entries is Thursday, April 1, 2004. Complete rules are available from the Asthma Alliance at 317-221-2473.

Winning artists will receive awards during World Asthma Day activities on Saturday, May 8, 2004, at the Glendale Mall, Indianapolis.

The Indianapolis Asthma Alliance, formed in 1997, provides a range of educational services and programs. It comprises the Marion County Health Department, pediatric doctors, nurses, respiratory therapists, social workers, and individuals involved in environmental health.



Poster by Jack Jordan

Department and the Asthma Alliance.

Health officials report that at least 15 million Americans, including 4.8 million children, suffer from asthma. Asthma accounts for one third of all pediatric emergency room visits. In addition, asthma is the fourth most common reason for pediatric physician office visits, and is one of the leading causes of school absenteeism.

(continued from page 1)

The stats are in: Indiana and influenza

Right: Andy Zirkle, Public Affairs, is interviewed by WTHR-Channel 13 about Indiana's flu vaccine shortage.

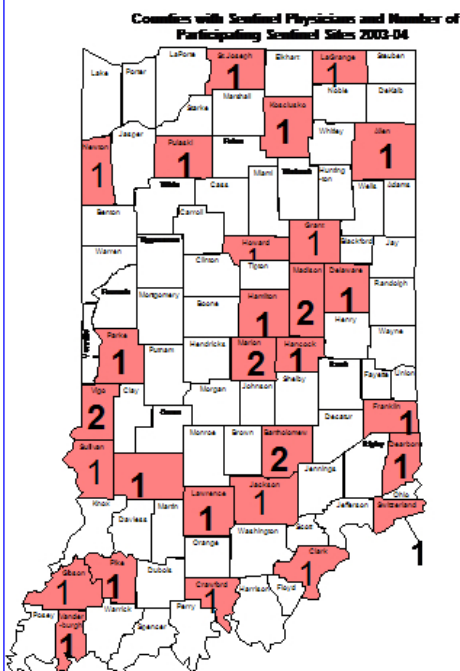
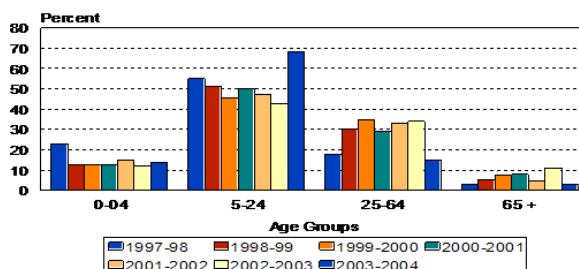
Left: Indiana counties with sentinel sites, which provide the Indiana State Department of Health and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) with weekly influenza case numbers.



Below: Based on the information provided by the sentinel sites, the State Department of Health is able to chart Indiana influenza cases. This chart breaks the reported cases into age groups and year. Notice the 2003-2004 cases.

Influenza Like Illness by Age Groups

Indiana, 1997-2003



Learn healthy eating habits during nutrition month

March is National Nutrition Month®. Sponsored by the American Dietetic Association, this nutrition education and information campaign focuses attention on the importance of making informed food choices and encourages individuals to develop healthy eating and physical activity habits.

The theme for National Nutrition Month® 2004 is "Eating Smart to Stay Healthy." The American Dietetic Association is encouraging individuals to be smart about the foods they eat, by knowing what they are eating and making wise food choices.

"Healthy eating gives you more energy and the physical well-being to help you stay healthy for today and the rest of your life," said Minneapolis-based registered dietitian Susan Moores, a spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association.

The American Dietetic Association offers the following tips for National Nutrition Month® 2004:

- ▶ Whatever the food, **eat a sensible serving size.** Knowing the appropriate serving sizes for you is part of eating smart.
- ▶ Add color to your plate by eating **more fruits and vegetables.** Think red, green and orange - fruits and vegetable are packed with vitamins, minerals, fiber and phytochemicals that may help prevent some cancers and lowers blood pressure.
- ▶ Try adding fresh fruit to pancakes or yogurt.
- ▶ Explore the wide world of foods - expand your tastes and get the nutrients your body needs.
- ▶ Try a new food or recipe at least once a month or new ethnic cuisine at a local restaurant.



FOOD SAFETY: New regulations discussed

(continued from page 2)

Food security was the topic of a presentation by Travis Goodman, Food Protection.

Goodman pointed out the difference between food security and food safety, explaining that food security seeks to protect the food and water supply from a deliberate attack, while food safety aims to decrease dangers due to accidents or neglect.

Lee Bray, Food Protection, then took much of the audience back to their days

of microbiology class with a presentation on the more common micro-organisms that cause illness. He showed slides of salmonella, E. coli, Shigella and norovirus, among others.

The group also heard Dr. Larry Yoder, a professor at Goshen College, speaking for Indiana Maple Syrup Processors. He discussed the process of making maple syrup with the group. He shared some information that would specifically help the food inspectors when out in the field.

West Nile

(continued from page 2)

mosquito larvae already hatching in the Central part of the state. Cooler temperatures in the evenings will slow down their development into adult mosquitoes. However, ISDH Medical Entomologist Mike Sinsko, says that he expects to see adult mosquitoes circulating by mid-May.

"This is an ideal time to get the prevention message out to the public," said Howell. "We urge people to check their property for standing water and to do their best to eliminate any possible mosquito breeding grounds."

Health officials say that people can protect their family and their community in the upcoming season from the mosquitoes that carry West Nile virus by taking these actions now:

- ♦ Cleaning clogged roof gutters, particularly if leaves tend to plug up the drains;
- ♦ Repairing failed septic systems;
- ♦ Drilling holes in the bottom of recycling containers that are left out of doors;
- ♦ Keeping grass cut short and shrubbery trimmed;
- ♦ Disposing of old tires, tin cans, or other unused containers that can hold water; and
- ♦ Aerating ornamental pools, or stocking them with predatory fish.

Indiana and Maple Syrup

*Forget Vermont! Indiana makes maple syrup, too!
Did you know...*

- ▶ North America is the only place in the world where sugar maple trees grow.
- ▶ Indiana is about as far North as the trees grow.
- ▶ Indiana has approximately 200 producers of this treat and produces about 5,000 gallons of it yearly.
- ▶ The collection season runs mid-February through mid-to-late March.